

Waives closing. We will now vote on the committee amendments to LB 643. All those in favor vote aye, opposed vote no. Record, Mr. Clerk.

CLERK: 26 ayes, 0 nays, Mr. President, on the adoption of committee amendments.

SPEAKER BAACK: The committee amendments are adopted. To Senator Rasmussen, to open on the bill.

SENATOR RASMUSSEN: Mr. Speaker, members of the body, LB 643 was introduced for two reasons, one, recognizing that as we were facing a...a year of fiscal shortages that the issue of how we're spending our dollars would come up, and I anticipated that it would come up in respect to the Nebraska School for the Deaf. And the second reason it was introduced is that I think that we all would agree that we have a responsibility to continue to provide appropriate education for children who are hearing impaired or deaf, and that we certainly shouldn't just shut off the School for the Deaf without some thought going into how are we going to continue to provide appropriate education, as well as cultural environment for these children. The school itself has a long history, and it's a history of people in the deaf community are very proud of, as they should be, in terms of academic excellence and opportunities that have been provided there. But what has happened over the last ten to twelve years is a steady decline in the number of students that go to that school. In the early eighties we had close to 200 students that were on the campus. By 1985, that had dropped below 100, and now it's down to 56, with only about 30 of those being residential, the others are day students. Not only have the numbers dropped, but that relationship has changed. It used to be two to one with the number of kids being residential as opposed to day students only. As a result of this decline in the enrollment at the school, we've had a significant increase in the cost per child for education at the school. Educational costs for children there today are approximately 40,000 per child. Residential costs are about \$85,000. So while this has happened, we need to take a serious look at whether or not this is the best use of our dollars. What we have now on this campus is about 4,000 square feet per child, and we are spending approximately \$500 a month per child in utilities. The issue here is not whether or not we should have a residential program or whether or not we should mainstream children into the regular class room. That often becomes the focal point when you try and